

THE STORY
of
OUR WEDDING JOURNEY

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THE STORY
of
OUR WEDDING JOURNEY

"AS IT WAS WRITTEN DOWN BY ONE WHO HEARD"
NELLIE OLMSTED LINCOLN

PRIVATELY PRINTED IN SAN FRANCISCO, 1911

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BY
A. M. EASTON

*"The wondrous peril that is past
Makes present joys more dear."*



TO MY
CHILDREN,
GRANDCHILDREN,
AND
GREAT GRANDCHILDREN
THIS STORY OF MY WEDDING JOURNEY
IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED

MARRIED

MILLS-EASTON. August 20, 1857. In San Francisco,
by the Rev. S. H. Willey, at the Howard Street Con-
gregational Church, ADELINE MILLS to ANSEL IVES
EASTON.





I.

A Major Chord

The bell of the good ship "Sonora" rang lustily and with a good courage. It seemed to realize that it was playing a new rôle in the drama of life, for on this bright morning it was a wedding bell.

Right well it entered into the spirit of the day, though little dreaming that for the lovely young bride, now coming aboard the ship to its cheerful tones, it should for more than fifty years ring in the joy days of her life and toll its sad cadence in her days of woe.*

It was early one bright August morning, of the year 1857, in the city of San Francisco that Adeline Mills and Ansel Ives Easton, having "in the presence of God and a goodly company" promised to love and to comfort one another until death them should part, came from the church,

* The bell of the "Sonora" was given soon after this to the Church of St. Matthew at San Mateo, where it hung until the earthquake of 1906, which destroyed the church. The bell was uninjured and now is used in the beautiful new church which has been erected on the same site. Mrs. Easton has been a member of this church many years.

A MAJOR CHORD

and with many friends started to drive to the ship that was to sail within an hour. The carriage of the bride and groom had gone but a short distance when the driver suddenly reined in the horses and a moment later a friend looked anxiously in at the carriage door.

"You'll have to go back, this street is all torn up. It's bad luck; I hate to have you do it, but there is no other way."

With the optimism which was to carry her through many remarkable experiences in the years to come, the young bride laughingly poo-pooed the idea of bad luck, not allowing them to think her at all nervous. Turn back they did, and in a short time were aboard the ship at its moorings.

Such a happy party—so many loving friends, so many beautiful clothes and gifts packed in trunks in the hold, so many good things to eat—hampers of wine and choice biscuits and cakes, given with laughter and good wishes for a bon voyage.

And the bell of the good ship "Sonora" rang its warning to those not sailing. Last good-byes were said and in the sunshine of love, with the joyousness of life before them, down the

A MAJOR CHORD

bay, out through the Golden Gate they sailed, over the waters of the blue Pacific to the haven of Panama.

The voyage to the isthmus was one long delight, with smooth waters, sunny skies, and a joyous, congenial company. The trip overland to Aspinwall was uneventful and all too short, and many plans were made for passing the days from Aspinwall to New York. And all went merry as a marriage bell.

II.

A Minor Cadence

"What were you and Captain Herndon talking about, Ansel, when he said he didn't believe in bad luck?"

I was standing watching the distance between the wharf and the ship grow greater, and had been listening to my husband and the captain talking. Now as he came nearer I put my arm through his and asked him what it was all about.

"About this ship having her name changed! It was the George Law, but Mr. Law sold his stock in her and so the company changed her name to the Central America. I don't like changing the name of a ship, but I think this is all right," replied my husband.

"Why, of course it is! Come, let us take a walk up and down the deck. It is such a glorious day! Aspinwall is fading from view and we have only happy memories of our trip; don't let us worry about the future. Tell me about some of the people on board."

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"Well, we have many of our old friends with us yet—Brown, Judge Munson, Dr. Obed Harvey, Mr. Payne, and Sammy Shreve, who is going to New York to be married, you know. Oh, well! the captain tells me it's a rich cargo—seven hundred passengers and two million dollars aboard."

"A wonderful cargo of souls and gold. When do we leave Havana?" I asked.

"We shall be out four days and shall sail again from Havana the eighth of September."

The morning of the eighth found us on board again early, watching with great interest the many persons coming and going.

"Well! there's Captain McGowan of the 'Empire City,'" said Mr. Easton, as a pleasant-faced man came aboard.

"How are you Easton? Wish you were going with me."

"Rather wish we were; don't like a ship that's changed its name."

"Is it too late to change?" said the Captain.

"Oh, yes," I said; "everything is ready. We have trunks and those hampers,—and I'm sure this vessel is all right."

"What's this?" said Mr. Easton, hurriedly, and we all then turned as a man coming aboard fell.

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"That's the first mate Van Rensaeler, and he's as drunk as a lord. Don't think I like the idea of his being in command," continued my husband.

"He'll probably sober up now," I laughingly rejoined.

Captain McGowan bade us good-bye, and as we turned toward the cabin the chief engineer of the ship was standing near talking earnestly with a woman.

And so for the third time on our wedding journey we sailed away and all seemed fair and joyous, and none knew that 'neath the gaily painted deck the wood had lost its sturdy strength; its oaken sides were too frail to stand the buffeting of angry waves and that on the prow sat all unseen the veiled figure of the great Unknown.

Captain Herndon had arranged to have us at his table, and as he was a most delightful man, we enjoyed it very much.

It seemed as if we could not get away from the thought of ill luck, for at dinner that first evening the conversation turned to the subject of shipwrecks, and how well I remember Captain Herndon's face as he, in speaking of some vessel lately wrecked of which the captain had been

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saved, said, "Well, I'll never survive my ship. If she goes down I go under her keel. But let us talk of something more cheerful," and the captain told us some interesting and delightful experiences he had had in his remarkable Amazon expedition.

The next morning, as Mr. Shreve met Mr. Easton on the deck he laughingly said, "Well, Easton, in spite of your forebodings, we haven't gone down yet."

"Well, Sammy," said my husband, "we haven't reached New York yet."

Thursday there came up a severe gale, which increased in violence, producing a heavy head sea. Many anxious questions were asked the captain, but he was cheerful and encouraging.

Mr. Brown also talked reassuringly, but it was a very uncomfortable time, and as we were all more or less seasick, nearly every one went to their staterooms.

All Thursday night the storm raged, and Friday was no calmer. The stewardess came to ask if I needed anything, but I was too ill to even think of eating.

About noon on Friday the vessel suddenly careened to one side, and, looking toward our

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port-hole, I noticed that it was entirely under water.

"Ansel, Ansel," I cried, "we are sinking!"

Forgetting our seasickness, we both hastily threw our wrappers over our night clothes and hurried to the salon. One glance at the appalled faces made us realize the imminent peril we were in.

"Let us get to the upper side of the room," said my husband, as he threw his arm about me, and, a friend also coming to my side, they helped me to reach a settee on the far side of the cabin. Not a sound was heard; no tears nor hysterics. Despair seemed written on every face, and there was only the marvelous silence of a hushed and awe-stricken throng.

The captain's voice at the door added a thrill of horror, as he said: "All men prepare for bailing the ship. The engines have stopped, but we hope to reduce the water and start them again. She's a sturdy vessel and if we can keep up steam we shall weather the gale."

"The engines stopped! What does that mean, Ansel?"

"It means, I fear, that the engineer has not

done his duty," said my husband, as he sat beside me with my hand in his.

Looking into his eyes, I said: "Oh, Ansel, if you hadn't married me, you wouldn't have been in all this trouble!"

Even in the midst of his despair, he smiled, and drawing me closer, said tenderly: "If I knew it all before hand, I should do the same again." The human heart is certainly as mysterious in its workings as that Providence which we so vainly try to understand. Here in the midst of mortal peril, with death before me, with all the joys of life, so wonderfully loved, disappearing, those words made even the storm and shipwreck nothing.

Sitting close to my beloved, we committed ourselves calmly, quietly into His care, whose voice even the winds and sea obeyed. We spoke lovingly of our dear ones, and decided that when the last moment came we should go down together hand in hand.

"But until all hope is past we must work," he said, and after kissing me, he joined the men who were so strenuously trying to lower the water. Our friend, Mr. Brown, who had been sitting near went with him, and soon I watched

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them working so hard to bail the water from the cabin floor.

Not far from me sat a young Mr. Jones, with his head in his hands. He came over to me as he saw Mr. Easton and Mr. Brown starting to work.

"Here, Mrs. Easton, is my watch. Will you take care of it for me while I go and help?"

He was a handsome young fellow. Some had said he was a large landed proprietor of Kentucky and some that he was the cleverest gambler in San Francisco; but one touch of shipwreck makes the whole world kin, and in the days to come his kind heart and skillful fingers made life a little more bearable to some pretty wretched mortals.

The wind still blowing a tremendous gale, the captain gave orders to cut away the foremast. As it crashed down and was swept away it seemed as if hope went with it; but joy came again as we heard that the water being lowered, the engines were starting.

Soon the throb of the machinery seemed to put new life in us all. With renewed hope, the men worked harder, passing buckets up one stairway and down another, while barrels were rigged on

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deck to bail out the engine-room. The donkey engines for bailing the ship had been found to be useless and out of repair.

Hope, the great strengthener, made strong again the men almost exhausted. But, alas! only a few revolutions, and the engines stopped forever.

Despair settled over all once more.

As the night grew darker rockets of distress were set off. Blankets and rugs were packed about the smoke-stacks and hatches to keep out the water, but of no avail.

"We are righting," I said as we watched the lamps with great interest to see them hang gradually level.

I tried to cheer those near me with that thought, little knowing that as the ship became waterlogged she would right herself before sinking.

Nothing had been cooked on the steamer all day, the store-rooms of the ship being filled with water, and with the strenuous work and no food man after man became exhausted. About eleven o'clock I thought of the hampers in our stateroom, and with great difficulty reached the room and brought out boxes of biscuits and some wine.

Ansel and Mr. Brown were both working

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hard, though I could see they were almost worn out.

"Here!" I said, "you must sit down and eat and drink a little."

As I passed among the men they eagerly took the crackers and wine, only stopping long enough to eat them and then going on with the work of bailing.

All night at intervals I went the rounds until everything we had was used. How little our dear friends who brought us these things dreamed the use that would be made of them, or what a help they were to be in our dire need.

When too exhausted to work longer my dear husband would come and sit by me for a few minutes and with clasped hands we talked to each other of our dear, dear friends, of our brief happiness together and our hopes for the future.

Life had never seemed so attractive or dear to either of us, yet the wonderful truth, which has so often been told of absolute calmness in the moment of death, became a reality to us.

It was so hard to sit quietly without making some effort to save.

Oh, the long weary night; how I counted the moments as they slowly dragged along, and

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about three o'clock the captain appeared at the door.

"If we can keep the ship up three or four hours more, we certainly shall see a sail and help will come. You remember the 'San Francisco' floated eleven days."

Brave words and cheerily spoken, and though they really made no difference in our situation, we all responded to his bright influence and felt more hopeful.

Never was daylight more gratefully welcomed than on that Saturday morning, the last that ever dawned on many a noble heart.

We thanked God for the daylight's cheering presence and renewed our exertion. Every one was wet, cold and hungry; the waves dashed over the deck and the vigil for a sail began again. More barrels were rigged through the skylights and for a time they seemed to gain on the water; the clouds began to break away and the wind to lull. Every countenance brightened and all labored more heartily. But no sail in sight yet, and alas, even with all our increased efforts it was soon evident that the water was gaining, and to our unspeakable dismay the fury of the storm returned. Despair, its cloak of horror threw

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over us once more; when suddenly, about two o'clock in the afternoon, a cry was heard, "A sail! a sail!"

In a few moments a vessel was seen bearing down upon us and we hailed her with cheers.

For the first time since the storm began the people lost control. Strong men wept, women laughed and cried and it seemed for a few moments as if there would be a panic on the deck.

A stern word from the captain brought order and every eye eagerly watched the vessel drawing near.

Her captain hailed us and promised every help.

She was the brig "Marine," herself disabled and short of provisions, carrying a cargo of sugar and molasses to Honduras. She "lay to" as near us as she could, but owing to the strong current and to her condition she kept floating away. Joy was in every heart, for now we should all be saved.

I went to my stateroom and put on a dress skirt to cover my night dress and wrapper, which I afterwards took off, as I thought I might get in the water and it would cause me to sink, then went to my small trunk which was in the room and took my dear mother's miniature, also one of

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my brother James. Taking a shawl and putting on a life preserver, I started to go above. Ansel could not come to help me as he was working hard on deck, but just as I reached the door of the room he came in.

"Hurry, dear!" he said, "We shall all be saved, but the women and children are to be taken off first."

"Oh, I can't go without you," I cried, my courage vanishing at the thought of leaving him on the sinking ship.

"But, dearest, you must go; I shall follow very soon," he said tenderly.

"Come, Easton," said Mr. Brown at the door, "you must hurry; they are taking the second boat-load now."

Ansel hurried to the trunk, taking out a coat, into the pockets of which he put nine hundred dollars and some valuable papers and rolled it into a bundle.

He and Mr. Brown helped me to the deck just as the second boat-load was completed.

"Only one boat more," the captain said as Ansel asked him how many there were. "We had five but two were dashed to pieces as they were being

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manned, so we have but three. I think, however, they can make several trips before dark."

It was not a very encouraging thought that perhaps as one reached the small boat it would be dashed to pieces against the ship.

"All ready," said the captain, and with my husband's kiss upon my lips and breathing a prayer for his safety, I found myself swinging from the deck, and as a huge wave brought the boat underneath, the rope was lowered and I dropped into the bottom of the boat. It was a dreadful moment, for we were in great danger of swamping or being dashed to pieces; but even in that moment of terror, a touch of the ridiculous helped to bring me back, for the contents of one of the barrels used for bailing came down on my head, completely drenching me. Ansel threw me his coat containing the money and also took off the coat he was wearing and threw it to me to put about my shoulders. These were all the things we saved.

With a mighty effort the men got the boat under headway, when suddenly a huge wave rolled over it and it was half filled with water.

It was a good thing just at this moment, when I felt that I could not keep from breaking down

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at the parting with my dear husband, that I had to rouse myself for action. The men were all needed to row the boat, the other women were hysterical and so all the long mile we had to go before we reached the brig was spent in bailing the boat. The old tin I had to use was large, and it was a pretty tired out individual that was pulled up out of the boat over the rail, to the deck of the "Marine."

The old captain welcomed us with cheering words, though he afterwards told me he feared we'd left one sinking ship for another. My only thought was for my husband, and I could not be prevailed upon to go down to the cabin, but waited on deck, to watch for the boats which had returned to the sinking ship. Soon one came near enough to see the people who were in her. Surely he would be there, but no.

However, close behind came another boat, and hope was centered on her. Alas, another disappointment, and then with anxious heart and a choking fear I saw a third boat come close to the ship and in it was not the one I longed to see. It was growing dark and the boatmen refused to go back again to the ship. I put my face down in my hands, too wretched to speak, reproaching

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myself that I had not stayed with him, regretting that I had not defied Captain and all when they commanded us to leave.

Some one touched me on the shoulder and the kind voice of Captain Burt said, "Here's a letter from your husband, Mrs. Easton, brought by some one in the last boat."

"A letter!"

I hurriedly opened the scrap of blue paper, on which was written in pencil:

My Dear Wife—

If the captain of the "Marine" will send a boat forward for me you can give him what he will ask. I will watch for it and be on hand.

Your affectionate husband,

A. I. E.

"Oh, Captain, do send one more boat back!"

"My dear Mrs. Easton, I wish I could, but in such a sea as this and in the darkness a boat could not make the trip."

"But Captain, Captain, they may all die before morning. Anything—ten thousand dollars if you will send another boat."

"My dear, dear lady, if I could send it, one should go without a cent of money, but a boat

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such as we have would not live a moment. I will try to take the brig nearer the steamer and she will probably float until the morning."

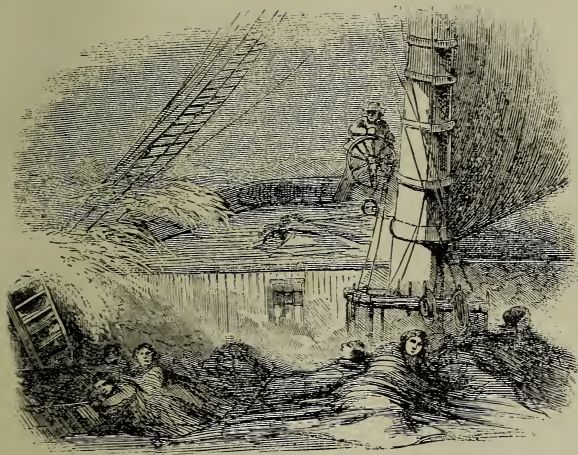
The brig was so badly crippled that he had to make a long circuit, and as we came back towards the steamer we watched her lights flashing.

Suddenly a rocket shot out obliquely, the lights disappeared beneath the waves, and all the world grew dark for me.

The captain urged me to go below in the cabin, where it was more protected, and half dazed I followed him.

The cabin was a little place and the waves had dashed over the hatchways so that the water was about three inches deep all over the floor. Here were huddled thirty women and twenty-six children, many of them sitting on the floor. The scene was indescribable.

"Oh, Captain, I simply cannot stay here," I said, and with one woman friend, who also mourned her husband lost on the ship, we went back to the deck. The captain brought a large piece of sail cloth and spread it on the deck at the prow, and we were just settling ourselves on it when a wave coming over the ship, completely drenched us; but such was my agony of



PASSENGERS SLEEPING ON THE DECK OF BRIG "MARINE."
(Reproduced from old print.)

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mind that I was not conscious of my physical sufferings.

After some time Captain Burt came back with another large piece of sail, and putting it on top of the hatchway, my friend and I lay down on it and were covered with another heavy piece of canvas. That was our bed for six long, weary days and nights. On the third day out we met a schooner, which we hailed, asking for provisions and water. The captain came aboard and looking at us, disheveled, sunburned, even blistered with the long exposure, said with tears in his eyes, "Heaven knows I'm sorry for you! You can have anything I have."

Imagination painted the picture of the sinking of the ship over and over. During the day I would go down into the cabin to see what I could do to help, but at night again and again I seemed to see and hear the struggles of the drowning, and I reproached myself that I had not stayed to share my dear one's fate.

The captain's kindness I can never forget. During those long night hours he would tell us of the many wonderful rescues he had known and always ended with the cheering words,

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"Something tells me that you will meet your husband when we get in port."

Provisions were very scarce and the supply of water was limited. Forty-one men had been taken on the brig, but most of them were steerage passengers. Mr. Jones, however, had been one of the few I knew and he had been most kind. Our food was mush and molasses and there were no spoons, except a very few old ones used by the crew. One of my cherished possessions for many years was a spoon carved from a piece of wood by Mr. Jones and given me. It was highly prized and after each meal I carefully washed it and kept it with me.

Six days of suspense and suffering passed when one morning we found ourselves in sight of Cape Henry lighthouse.

We were several miles off, with scarcely any breeze, and seeing a steamer coming which proved to be a propeller bound for Charlestown, we hailed her. He was a wily old captain and wouldn't tow us in for less than five hundred dollars.

Captain Burt assured him that it was impossible, but after a long delay the money was collected and turned over to him.

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We realized then how fortunate we had been in having such a man as Captain Burt to help us in our direst need, for he had spared nothing in all those days.

Joyful news came aboard with the pilot as we entered the bay.

Forty-nine had that morning arrived in Norfolk from the wrecked vessel, but he didn't know a name.

I felt very sad and downcast and could hardly speak. The intense fear that my dear husband might not be among the saved seemed to numb me.

In a little while the steamer "Empire City" came in sight. She stopped, a small boat was lowered and Captain McGowan came aboard. His first inquiry was, "Where is Mrs. Easton?" and added, "Tell her her husband is awaiting her in Norfolk."

I scarcely knew what I did for a few moments. A number of the ladies threw their arms about me and even the rough sailors heartily congratulated me on the safety of my dear husband.

As the captain came aboard he took me by the hand and we both felt too deeply to speak for some minutes. Then he said:

"Let us sit down here, for I must tell you all about it. He is safe and anxiously waiting for you. This morning I was sleeping on my ship in the Norfolk harbor, when suddenly I was wakened by some one knocking on my door."

"Who is that?" I said, rather gruffly, I fear, and to my amazement a voice said, 'Easton.' 'My God, man, where did you come from,' I shouted as I opened the door, for I knew something must have happened."

"Is he hurt?" I hurriedly asked.

"Not a bit, my dear Mrs. Easton. He's as hale and hearty as ever, only very anxious about you."

"Go on and tell me about what happened to him that dreadful night."

"Well, after he sent you a note he watched until too dark for a boat."

"Oh, I tried so hard to send him one," I said.

"He was standing on the wheelhouse with the captain and several others when his friend Brown came up and gave him a life preserver and a coat. Mr. Easton put on the life preserver and threw the coat about his shoulders, buttoning it at the neck. The captain turned to Mr. Easton and said, 'Give me your cigar, Easton, for this last rocket,' and as he was handing it to him

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the ship gave a great plunge and in a moment Mr. Easton felt a man's arm about his neck and in the terrible suction made by the sinking of the ship, he was drawn down with bewildering rapidity. Struggling to free himself from the death grip he thought to unbutton the coat. It slipped from his shoulders in the hands of the first mate. At the instant of relief he shot upward and found himself among hundreds of human beings, each struggling for life. A large plank which had been the front of a berth floated by and this he grasped. On this he floated for eight hours. At first he could see the lights of a ship off in the distance. He thinks he must have been a little delirious for he had no fear of drowning and seemed to feel that he was reaching out to a far country. He did not see the ship, the 'Ellen,' which finally rescued him, until she was very close. He was perfectly composed, took the rope thrown out to him, ascended, put on the dry clothing provided and went to work assisting in caring for those who were saved and calling out the names of every one he knew, hoping to get a response from the water. Mr. Easton felt most keenly Mr. Brown's loss and begged the captain to stay until they found him.

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Finally after some hours and no more persons being found, Captain Johnson of the 'Ellen' said, 'I think these are all there are.' Mr. Easton said to him, 'Oh, Captain, tack just once more and then if we can't find him, we can go on.' This the captain gladly did, and for some time Mr. Easton stood at the rail shouting 'Brown, Brown.' In the distance a small dark object was seen and as it came nearer they saw it was a hatchway with two men on it—Mr. Brown and a Mr. Bement.

"The captain of the 'Ellen' told them that early the evening before he had been on the outlook with one of his officers, when a large bird flew in his face. He beat it off and a second time it came; again he thrust it from him, and a third time it came. Being a little superstitious he said to the mate. 'I believe there's trouble some where; I'm going to turn the ship and go in the direction this bird has flown.' This he did and within an hour came upon the crowd of floating men, and forty-nine were saved."

"Now, my dear Mrs. Easton," continued the captain, "this is the wonderful story of your husband, and as soon as he told me you had

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been saved on the 'Marine' I arranged to start out to find you if possible."

He offered to take as many on to New York as cared to go in the "Empire City," and about sixty went with him.

The chief engineer of the "Central America" was the only officer on the "Marine" who had deserted the ship, and in all the dreadful days every one had felt that his negligence in allowing the engines to die down had caused our great disaster.

On his attempting to enter the boat to be taken to the "Empire City," Captain McGowan stopped him.

"Not on my steamer. You can't come aboard."

We reached quarantine just after dark, and taking a small boat were rowed seven miles to the city.

We landed away from the usual wharf, down near a lumber yard, and the forlorn little procession walked up to the hotel.

Arriving there, my disappointment was great at not meeting my husband, but I soon learned that in his impatience to see me, on hearing that the brig was at quarantine, he had taken Captain

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Johnson and had gone out in a small boat to the ship.

Of our meeting a few hours later I cannot speak. Great joy is too deep for words. Kindness loaded us with everything we needed. One lady insisted upon presenting us with a trunk. I laughingly told her that I didn't have a thing to put in it, so had to decline.

Captains Johnson and Burt were both true sons of the sea; brave, generous and kindly, and but for their timely and unselfish aid no one would have been saved to tell the story of the wreck. My husband's friendship and gratitude to them lasted throughout his life.

'T was a joyous meeting, when after our many tribulations we were met by our loving family and friends in New York. As ever in the world, the sad and amusing, the pathetic and the ludicrous are side by side, for we came back from the perils of the deep to find ourselves real live curiosities.



THE BELL OF THE "SONORA."
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III

An Alleluia

The bell of the good ship "Sonora" still rings joyously each Sunday, as through the carved entrance of the resurrected church comes a stately, white-haired woman, as ever helpful and cheery. And the bell of the good ship—it seems to say, over and over,—

"God's in his heaven,
All's well with the world."

All's well—all's well.







